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ABSTRACT

To identify and interpret some of the attitudes toward and levels of support for competitive forensic activities on college campuses, a study surveyed the chief administrative officer at every institution identified in the Speech Communication Association's 1988 Directory (339 of the 1,100 surveys mailed were completed). Questions concerned past and current funding of debate and individual events teams, perceived barriers to and benefits of forensic programs, and personal assessments over the value of forensics. Analysis suggested that the number of debate and individual events programs has declined. Although the majority of administrators indicated that having forensic teams was important, data were not conclusive as to whether these personal feelings of value translated into faculty positions or funding. A large "no response" rate for questions requesting information about faculty positions and budget sources and levels restricted the analysis of this area. (Eight tables of data are included.) (MM)

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UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS AND FORENSICS: WHAT DO THE OFFICIALS THINK ABOUT THE ACTIVITY?

by

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A paper presented at the National Convention of the Speech Communication Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 4, 1988.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the attitudes of college and university administrators regarding the value of debate and individual events programs as a dimension of their overall offerings for students. Three hundred and thirty-nine questionnaires were returned [31 percent] out of 1100 sent to the chief administrators at all institutions listed in the 1988 Speech Communication Association's Directory. Past and current funding of debate and individual events teams, barriers to institutional support for these teams, benefits of having these teams, and personal assessments over the value of forensics were identified. Faculty coaching positions and funding levels for 1987-88 were provided.

UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS AND FORENSICS: WHAT DO THE OFFICIALS THINK ABOUT THE ACTIVITY?

Although the First and Second Developmental Conferences on Forensics identified the cultivation of administrative support for forensic programs as an important dimension of the forensic director's job, little published research has resulted measuring the levels of administrative support that exist. In fact, beyond the survey commissioned by the First Developmental Conference (Pearce, 1974) "to determine forensics was thought of by groups in the speech communication profession" (p. 134), no study has explored the attitudes of collegiate administrators regarding the values associated with the existence of competitive forensics as a dimension of the college or university's overall program.

At the Developmental Conference on Individual Events, strategies were introduced to build support for competitive forensics. Greenstreet (1988) suggested that a rationale for individual events should be consistent with the mission statement for each institution and steps should be taken to encourage more administrative support. Harris (1988) recommended the creation of annual reports to enable forensic directors to publicize and review their activities in relation to administrative priorities and their own effectiveness in reaching their objectives. Underberg (1988) urged "the collection and dissemination of information about funding levels, activity levels, and instructional demands in forensics" (p. ii). With this information, directors of forensics might be able to better

secure support for their forensic programs. Others actually called for a survey of administrative attitudes and institutional support for forensic programs (Littlefield, 1988).

The assumption underlying these suggestions rests upon the belief that currently there is not enough support for forensic programs among administrators who tend to control the funding for these programs. Pearce (1974) identified a number of criticisms of forensics held by members of the speech communication profession. However, discovering the attitudes of administrators regarding the value of forensic programs could provide insight into reasons why programs have continued to exist on some campuses while disappearing from others. The present study is an attempt to identify and interpret some of the attitudes and levels of support that exist on college campuses regarding the value of competitive forensic activities.

Procedure

The procedure used in this study consisted of surveying the chief administrative officer at every institution identified in the Speech Communication's 1988 Directory to obtain demographic information about the institution, the status of forensic activities on the campus, and the barriers to support or the benefits of support for forensic programs.

Subjects

The population was nominally defined as chief administrative officers at all institutions listed by department in the 1988 SCA Directory. Eleven hundred surveys were mailed to these institutions in the 50 states and foreign countries where affiliated departments are located. Three hundred and thirty-nine questionnaires were returned, approximating a 31 percent response rate [a 30 percent response rate for mass-mailed questionnaires is considered normal (Pearce, 1974)]. Table One identifies the number of respondents, their administrative levels, and the size of their institutions. The chief administrator was encouraged to pass the questionnaire along if unfamiliar with the information requested or pressured by time.

Table One
Respondents by Administrative Level and Size of Institution

Size of Institution	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	TOTAL
0-1999	31	25	5	7	33	8	1	1	4	115
2000-3999	17	11	3	2	16	3	1	0	2	55
4000-5999	11	8	0	1	9	6	1	0	1	37
6000-7999	7	7	0	4	1	3	1	1	3	27
8000-9999	8	5	2	1	8	5	1	0	1	31
10000-plus	12	7	9	7	11	21	4	0	3	74
Totals	86	63	19	22	78	46	9	2	14	339
	25%	19%	6%	6%	23%	14%	3%	1%	3%	100%

1 = Presidents, Provosts, Chancellors
2 = Vice-Presidents, Vice Chancellors
3 = Administrative Assistants to Categories 1 and 2
4 = Directors of College/University Offices
5 = Deans
6 = Chairs
7 = Directors of Forensics
8 = Faculty Members
9 = No response

Instrument

A questionnaire was developed to obtain the level of the "chief administrative officer" providing the information, demographic information about the institution, status of debate and individual events programs at the institution, perceived barriers to and benefits of forensic programs, a personal assessment of the activity, and levels of support during the 1987-88 academic year.

Results

Status of Forensic Programs

To secure information regarding current and past funding of forensic programs, questions inquired as to whether or not the institution had ever funded a debate or individual events team and whether or not the institution currently funded either or both of these dimensions of a forensic program. Table Two identifies the frequency of the responses for debate and individual events programs.

Table Two
Indication of Past and Current Funding of Debate and Individual Events Programs at Institutions Responding

	Debate		Individual Events	
	Past	Current	Past	Current
Yes	225	149	189	132
No	55	149	83	165
Unsure	26	6	37	8
No Response	33	35	30	34

Barriers Precluding Institutional Support

For those institutions not currently funding a debate or individual events program, four barriers were offered from which administrators were asked to prioritize with a "1" reflecting the greatest barrier, "2" next greatest barrier, through "4." If the administrators wished to offer a barrier of their own, the option was provided and then the prioritization could include a 5. The initial four barriers were the product of discussions with locally accessible university-level administrators, and included: Lack of monetary resources to sustain a program; lack of student interest in debate or IE programs; lack of faculty/coach interest in debate or IE programs; and not an institutional priority.

Table Three
Perceived Barriers to Institutional Support for Debate and Individual Events Programs

Level of Barrier	1	2	3	4	5
Greatest Barrier	34	30	21	17	2 a
2nd	21	22	27	17	1 b
3rd	21	17	22	14	2 c
4th	11	13	8	13	1 d
5th	0	0	0	2	1 e
Barrier (Unranked)	25	24	22	23	4 f
Total by Barrier	112	106	100	86	11
No Response	227	233	239	253	328

1 = Lack of monetary resources to sustain program
2 = Lack of student interest in debate/IE program
3 = Lack of faculty/coach interest in debate/IE program
4 = Not an institutional priority
5 = Other, as specified:
- a = Speech course only; 100% commuter institution
- b = We live in Alaska
- c = Student on-off pattern; too many competing extra-curricular activities
- d = Nature of student body, commuter school
- e = Speech not required for graduation

f = Not popular at 2-year colleges; no opponents because only University on an island; we decided programs do not help students to improve communication skills; need to use faculty for other assignments

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Perceived Benefits From Forensic Programs

For those administrators from institutions currently funding debate and/or individual events programs, four benefits were offered from which respondents were asked to prioritize using a "1" to reflect the greatest benefit, "2" for the next greatest benefit, through "4." If the administrators provided an additional benefit not listed, the rankings would include a "5." The benefits were the product of discussions with the same local university-level administrators. The benefits included that debate and individual events programs enhanced the recruitment of students to the institution, the recruitment of faculty, the attraction of scholarship contributions, and enhanced the education of students.

Table Four
Perceived Benefits to Institutions from Debate and Individual Events Programs

Level of Benefit	1	2	3	4	5	
Greatest Benefit	18	2	0	101	3	a
2nd	74	3	9	17	12	b
3rd	19	34	29	3	7	c
4th	4	27	35	3	2	d
5th	1	8	3	0	2	e
Benefit (Unranked)	54	11	14	82	13	f
Total by Benefit	170	85	90	206	39	
No Response	169	254	249	133	300	

1 = Enhances recruitment of students
2 = Enhances recruitment of faculty
3 = Attracts scholarship contributions

4 = Enhances education of students
5 = Other, as specified:
  a = Enhances public image; provides opportunity for student performance and recognition; application of theory brings together the value of a liberal arts
  b = Institutional recognition and visibility; improves retention and student satisfaction; provides major interest activity for these students who wish this sort of student participation; alumni involvement; enhances overall value of a liberal arts education; increases their understanding of significant issues, both national and international; enhances ethos of institution (2); enhances school/community relations; helps maintain an academic campus atmosphere; PR (2)
  c = Institutional visibility (3); enhances institution's reputation (2); encourages non-university attendance at international debates; excellent for job hunting
  d = Gives program visibility with administration and public; enhances university image
  e = Enhances image of college; concentrates attention on a rigorous academically-oriented program
  f = Favorable publicity (5); we have an outstanding coach who has earned support; adds a dimension of educational quality and opportunity; improves communication skills of students; aids in building networks; assists with public image of institution through news media and service projects; integral part of communication studies department curriculum; enhances academic reputation; supplementary experience; institutional prestige

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Personal Assessment of Value of Forensic Experience

Aside from institutional support or lack thereof, administrators responding were asked to provide their personal assessment of a debate or individual events team as an activity for students at their institutions. Using a Likert Scale (5 to 1) with "5" indicating that the administrator valued the team(s) as very important, "3" indicating moderate importance, and "1" as very unimportant, the following results were compiled in Table Five.

Table Five
Personal Assessments of a Debate or Individual Events Team as an Activity for Students

Level of Importance	Position 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Very Important	27	17	5	8	23	22	7	1	3	113 (34%)
4	27	21	9	5	28	10	0	1	3	104 (31%)
3	23	18	2	5	23	7	1	0	3	82 (25%)
2	7	6	2	3	3	3	1	0	0	25 (8%)
Very Unimportant	1	1	0	0	2	3	0	0	1	8 (2%)
No Response	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	3	7

1 = Presidents, Provosts, Chancellors
2 = Vice Presidents, Vice Chancellors
3 - Administrative Assistants to Categories 1 and 2
4 = Directors of College/University Officers
5 = Deans
6 = Chairs
7 = Directors of Forensics
8 = Faculty Members
9 = No response

Institutional Support of Debate and IE Teams

To determine existing levels of institutional support in terms of coaching staff, administrators were asked to use 1987-88 figures and indicate the number of full-time, tenure track and full-time non-tenure track positions. The number of part-time faculty and graduate assistants used as coaches for debate and IE teams was also solicited.

Table Six
1987-88 Levels of Support for Debate and IE Teams
by Number of Coaching Positions

Positions	1	2	3	4	5+	No Response
Full-time, tenure track	76	14	1	-	-	248
Full-time, non-tenure track	17	7	-	-	-	315
Part-time faculty	52	12	3	-	-	272
Graduate Assistants	16	9	4	4	2	304

Funding levels, as well as from where the funds used to support the programs were drawn, were requested. While some programs had separate funds to support team and coaching staff travel, other institutions allocated funds for general use by both team and coaching staff. Table Seven identifies levels of funding and source of funds for the 1987-88 academic year.

Table Seven
1987-88 Levels of Support for Team and Coaching Staff Travel

Level of Funding	Team Travel	Coaching Staff Travel
$ 0- 2999	32	33
$ 3000- 5999	40	6
$ 6000- 8999	25	*
$ 9000-11999	22	*
$12000-14999	12	*
$15000-above	38	1
*Included with team		101
No Response	170	198

The source of the funding for the team travel and coaching staff travel was also requested from the administrators responding to

the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to provide the name of the source of the funding.

Table Eight
Sources of Funding for Team Travel

Source of Funding	Team Travel	Coaching Staff Travel
College Budget	20	9
General Fund	63	16
Student Government	36	3
Departmental Budget	10	9
Instructional Budget	6	1
Combination of Above	23	2
Fundraising	3	-
Private Sources	1	-
Included with Team		102
No Response	177	197

In brief, the results of the survey provided data corresponding to past and current funding of debate and IE teams, barriers precluding institutional support for forensic programs, benefits of debate and IE teams, personal assessments regarding the value of these teams, and 1987-88 levels of support for debate and IE teams in terms of coaching positions and funding levels.

Discussion

For the institutions responding, the data would suggest that the number of debate and individual events programs has declined (by 76 in debate and 57 in IE). The frequency of the perceived barriers would indicate the greatest reason for the respondents explaining the absence of debate and IE teams was a lack of monetary resources to sustain the programs, followed by a lack of

student interest, a lack of faculty/coach interest, and the absence of an institutional priority.

Despite the decline in debate and IE programs, for those institutions with forensic teams, the vast majority indicated that the greatest benefit to institutions was the enhanced education of their students. This was followed by the enhanced recruitment of students for their institutions. By and large, administrators personally valued having debate and individual events teams as an activity for students at their institutions. Sixty-five percent considered the presence of these teams as either very important or important compared with ten percent who valued debate and individual events as unimportant or very unimportant. In Table Five, those administrators with the greatest influence on budgets (Presidents, Provosts, Chancellors, Vice Presidents, Vice Chancellors, Deans, and Department Chairs) indicated the high value they placed on debate and IE as an activity for students.

Institutional support varied. Eighty-one percent of the responding administrators with one full-time faculty forensic coach indicated that the position was tenure track. For the most part, most administrators responding had either one or two coaches at their institutions. Levels of funding for debate and IE teams would suggest that the most common budget range was between $3,000.00 and $5,999.00 during the 1987-88 academic year. A majority of the programs reviewed included funds to support the coaching staff within the team's travel budget. Based upon the

data, the reliance upon institutional budgets was greater than reliance upon student government funds or departmental/instructional budgets.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

The assumption underlying this study was that there is not enough support for forensic programs among administrators who control the funding for these programs. Despite the identification of benefits for those institutions which have debate and IE teams, the data would suggest that there has been a decline among the responding schools in the number of forensic programs in terms of sheer existence. Although a majority of the administrators personally viewed having forensic teams as very important or important, the data are not conclusive as to whether these personal feelings of value translate into faculty positions or funding.

The large "no response" rate for the questions requesting information about faculty positions and budget sources and levels makes the development of generalizable conclusions in this area difficult. However, the value of exploring attitudes and levels of support cannot be denied. While this study cannot claim to provide reasons why some programs continue to exist at the same time as others cease, the collection of the kinds of information included here is useful for the forensic director who must justify a program or seek additional funding. Administrators may

find this study interesting as they compare their levels of support for debate and IE programs with others across the country.

Additional follow-up studies need to be undertaken to review the status of forensic programs across the country. Once completed, they may provide insight regarding the rise and fall of debate and individual events teams and how administrative support can influence this fluctuation.

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